

The «Fascist reclamation» of textbooks from the Gentile Reform to the School Charter of Bottai

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Introduction

The following work proposes not only to examine more closely the state of research and to offer a clearer picture of the more recent and significant historiographical discoveries in the matter of school publishing and textbooks in the twenty year Fascist period, but also to throw light upon certain research trends and directions, which in some way or another have already begun or which must be held present, with the aim of deepening and integrating the knowledge which we already have at our disposition.

School textbook publishing is perhaps the field which has undergone the most intense and productive development¹ in the last decade with regards to studies on the history of Italian schools between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Furthermore, with reference to the results obtained, it is the field which has allowed us to redefine, and at times to completely overturn, a series of generalisations and stereotypes inherited from preceding school historiogra-

¹ See A. Bianchi, *La storia della scuola in Italia dall'Unità ai giorni nostri*, in L. Pazzaglia, R. Sani (eds.), *Scuola e società nell'Italia unita. Dalla Legge Casati al Centro-Sinistra*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2001, pp. 499-529; M. Galfré, *L'editoria scolastica dell'Italia unita nella storiografia. Bibliografia*, «La Fabbrica del Libro. Bollettino di storia dell'editoria in Italia», 7 (2001), 2, pp. 43-57; R. Sani, *Scuola e istruzione elementare in Italia dall'Unità al primo dopoguerra: itinerari storiografici e di ricerca*, in R. Sani, A. Tedde (eds.), *Maestri e istruzione popolare in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2003, pp. 3-17.

phy. These generalisations had been often fruit of the lack of a systematic and thorough research, or of an unsuccessful or partial use of the archives and printed sources available, and in some cases, of an approach which in some ways tended to perpetuate – even with reference to events of the school history – a perspective of the history of ideas and pedagogical doctrines, and which limited itself to making dogmatic assumptions and to throwing – upon reconstructions of the history of instruction and policies for school – some general interpretations taken from the political history and the history of cultural processes, interpretations which were not always far from ideological prejudice. And this happened – let it be clear – in an undifferentiated manner, or rather according to a custom which has united for a long time historians of schools and educational institutions of differing ideological orientation and cultural formation.

1. *Towards a history of schoolbook publishing and textbooks in the twenty year Fascist period: the contribution of recent historiography*

In these last few years, the systematic recourse to the use of archives and printed sources and the progressive increase in research trends and interests has allowed us to make a noticeable improvement in quality. With reference to sources, for example, the following have revealed themselves to be of extreme importance: the setting up of a systematic investigation of the school documentation relevant to the twenty year Fascist period which is conserved in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma (State Central Archive in Rome), the consultation of the archives of important publishing houses involved in the sector and of the private archives of certain leading characters (from Gentile to Codignola to Lombardo Radice etc.), the exploration carried out in the archives of certain school institutions, and finally, the systematic analysis of that “grey material” which includes the official periodic publications and the printed documentation produced by the Ministry of Education as well as the school journals of the time².

² See: S. Giusti, *Una casa editrice negli anni del fascismo. La Nuova Italia (1926-1943)*, Firenze, Olschki, 1983; A. Piccioni (ed.), *Una casa editrice tra società, cultura e scuola. La Nuova Italia 1926-1986*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1986; G. Pedullà, *Il mercato delle idee. Giovanni Gentile e la Casa editrice Sansoni*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1986; C. Ceccuti, *La Le Monnier dal Risorgimento alla Repubblica (1837-1987). Centocinquanta anni per la cultura e per la scuola*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1987; E. Decleva, *Arnoldo Mondadori*, Torino, Utet, 1988 (new ed.: Milano, Garzanti, 1998); S. Guarracino, *I manuali del consenso*, «I viaggi di Erodoto», 1989, 8, pp. 170-183; G. Turi, *Giovanni Gentile. Una biografia*, Firenze, Giunti, 1995; A. Scotto Di Luzio, *L'appropriazione imperfetta. Editori, biblioteche e libri per ragazzi durante il fascismo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1996; G. Turi (ed.), *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea*, Firenze, Giunti, 1997; L. Ponziani, *La Carab-*

With reference to the new approaches and research trends, an important contribution to the enlarging of the picture has come from the research on the history of school disciplines and didactical practices³ as well as on the history of teaching associations⁴, two research trends which have allowed researchers, among other things, to efficiently embrace the various and extremely complex factors as well as the dynamics which have historically characterised actual school life.

An equally important contribution has come from the studies on the history of publishing, or rather from the research whose approach is centred on the production and the Italian publishing market between the two World Wars and on the strategy of both large and small publishers, many of whom were involved in some way or another in the school sector⁵. This last approach, complementary to the approach of educational and school history, though not ignoring the relating ideological dimension of textbooks, all the same propos-

ba: una casa editrice tra scuola e cultura, in A. Gigli Marchetti, L. Finocchi (eds.), *Stampa e piccola editoria fra le due guerre*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1997, pp. 303-307; G. Chiosso, *Editoria e stampa scolastica tra Otto e Novecento*, in L. Pazzaglia (ed.), *Cattolici, educazione e trasformazioni socio-culturali in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1999, pp. 499-528; M. Galfré, *La disciplina della libertà. Sull'adozione dei testi nella scuola Fascista*, «Italia contemporanea», 2002, 228, pp. 407-438; R. Sani, *L'editoria educativo-popolare cattolica tra le due guerre*, in L. Pazzaglia (ed.), *Chiesa, cultura e educazione in Italia tra le due guerre*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2003, pp. 329-357; G. Chiosso, (ed.), *TESEO. Tipografi e editori scolastico-educativi dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2003; R. Sani, *Editori cattolici ed educazione della gioventù tra le due guerre*, in L. Finocchi, A. Gigli Marchetti (eds.), *Editori e piccoli lettori tra Otto e Novecento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2004, pp. 198-209; G. Chiosso, *L'editoria scolastica prima e dopo la riforma Gentile*, «Contemporanea», 7 (2004), 3, pp. 411-434; C. Betti (ed.), *Percorsi del libro per la scuola fra Otto e Novecento. La tradizione toscana e le nuove realtà del primo Novecento in Italia*, Firenze, Pagnini Editore, 2004; A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (eds.), *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo. L'opera della Commissione centrale per l'esame dei libri di testo da Giuseppe Lombardo Radice ad Alessandro Melchiori (1923-1928)*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2005; M. Galfré, *Il regime degli editori. Libri, scuola e fascismo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2005; G. Chiosso, *Il rinnovamento del libro scolastico nelle esperienze di Giuseppe Lombardo Radice e dei «lombardiani»*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», I (2006), 2, pp. 127-139.

³ See A. Ascenzi, *Tra educazione etico-civile e costruzione dell'identità nazionale. L'insegnamento della storia nelle scuole italiane dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2004.

⁴ See A. Barausse, *L'Unione Magistrale Nazionale. Dalle origini al fascismo 1901-1925*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2002.

⁵ See: G. Turi (ed.), *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea*, cit.; A. Gigli Marchetti, L. Finocchi (eds.), *Stampa e piccola editoria fra le due guerre*, cit.; Marchetti, Finocchi (eds.), *Editori e lettori. La produzione libraria in Italia nella prima metà del '900*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2000; Marchetti, Finocchi (eds.), *Editori e piccoli lettori tra Otto e Novecento*, cit.; A. Cadioli, E. Decleva, V. Spinazzola (eds.), *La mediazione editoriale*, Milano, Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, Il Saggiatore, 1999; N. Tranfaglia, A. Vittoria, *Storia degli editori italiani. Dall'Unità alla fine degli anni Sessanta*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2000; L. Clerici, B. Falcetto, G. Tortorelli (eds.), *Editoria libraria in Italia dal Settecento ad oggi. Bibliografia degli studi 1980-1998*, Milano, Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, Il Saggiatore, 2000; A. Gigli Marchetti, M. Infelise, L. Mascilli Migliorini, M.I. Palazzolo, G. Turi (eds.), *Editori italiani dell'Ottocento. Repertorio*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2004, 2 vols.

es above all an emphasis on the aspects and motives which relate to the politics of publishing, the characteristics and the transformations of the production and of the “school market”, the role and the strategies of the publishers and the complex relationship between the publishing houses, the political power and the school system⁶. Through such an approach it has been possible to fully grasp the multiplicity and complexity of the variables which are present and the scenes within which the very transmission of the cultural and ideological use of school texts and school handbooks⁷ unfold.

It is indeed the scarce understanding of the political-editorial and economical mechanisms which often determine ministerial choices and strategies with regards to school books which risks resulting in impartial readings and interpretations, that is, when not being downright misleading. With reference to the twenty year Fascist period, for example, the risk is to assume, from a historiographical point of view, a type of “idealistic” reading of the complex and many vicissitudes of school publishing and textbooks, or rather an interpretation which tends to trace the whole event to a contrast of ideals, to a confrontation based on cultural and pedagogical propositions, to a question in which the school and the dynamics which developed internally appear almost suspended in an abstract and auto-referential dimension.

The research and works mentioned above allow us, in a clearer and less general manner than in the past, to throw light upon the characteristics, the prominent passages, the basic directions and the results of what, with a somewhat emphatic metaphor, was defined as the “Fascist reclamation” of textbooks: a fundamental aspect of a more comprehensive project, followed with noticeable lucidity and determination by the Mussolini Regime, to realise a more organic and incisive ideological and political control on educational methods and through these, on the formation of the new generations⁸.

Such work also allows us to clear the field for once and for all of a series of preconceived convictions which have in fact become real and accepted historiographical beliefs, and which however, find no collation in reality, and which result to be in many ways decidedly misleading. I intend to refer, first of all to the controversial relationship which links the Gentile Reform – or more precisely, the work carried out between 1923-1924 by Giovanni Gentile and his collaborators, namely Giuseppe Lombardo Radice – and the successive process of fascistisation of the Italian school put in act by the Mussolini Regime, and in particular for that which concerns the didactical programmes and textbooks.

⁶ See in particular the already mentioned work by M. Galfré, *Il regime degli editori. Libri, scuola e fascismo*, cit., pp. VII-XV.

⁷ See R. Sani, C. Covato, *Percorsi dell'editoria scolastica nel ventennio Fascista. A proposito di un recente volume*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», I (2006), 2, pp. 369-383.

⁸ For this strategy see G. Turi, *Lo stato educatore. Politica e intellettuali nell'Italia Fascista*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002. See also the challenging reconstruction by G. Belardelli, *Il Ventennio degli intellettuali. Cultura, politica, ideologia nell'Italia Fascista*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2005.

The approaches which were in clear net discontinuity – if not a clean break – between the work of Gentile's group and that which was started following the Fascist totalitarianism merit clarification; in just the same way as how the disdainful, and at times positively ruthless judgement with which proceeded, from 1923 onwards, the liquidation of school publishing – reading books, manuals etc. – which were produced in the period of Giovanni Giolitti to the period following the First World War⁹ needs to be explored and assessed.

I also intend to refer to the idea according to which the secondary schools – not affected, with a difference to the elementary, by the preventive censorship of textbooks – were able, even in virtue of the vigorous cultural installation impressed on them by Gentile, to maintain a certain «oasis of liberty», which was able to stem, at least partly, the initiatives of the integral fascistisation of the school system started by the regime¹⁰. The systematic application of the racial legislation of 1938 in this type of school and the results produced by the process of fascistisation on the average teaching should raise a certain caution with regard to it¹¹.

Finally, I intend to refer to a presumed «passive resistance» (scarce conviction, defection etc.) of some of the components of the educational world, in particular of the teachers, in face of the impositions of the regime. The recent studies of Monica Galfré, in fact, have brought to light the fact that even where it was registered, such resistance was not able to «compromise the faithful application (and certain times even more so) of the regulations»¹².

The Gentile Reform and in particular the decisions which were made from 1923 onwards, with regard to textbooks and the relationship between school book publishers and elementary and secondary instruction, represent a crucial moment, a real divide with respect to the past: a change which was destined to transform consolidated set ups and equilibriums, as much in the educational sector as in the editorial sector. With regards to the editorial sector, it is also the

⁹ See A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (eds.), *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo. L'opera della Commissione centrale per l'esame dei libri di testo da Giuseppe Lombardo Radice ad Alessandro Melchiori (1923-1928)*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2005, pp. 270-290.

¹⁰ See J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1994, pp. 486-489; G. Genovesi, *Storia della scuola in Italia dal Settecento a oggi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1998, pp. 169-174.

¹¹ See R. De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo*, Torino, Einaudi, 1961 (the 5th ed., here mentioned, dates back to 1993), pp. 357-401; F. Levi, *Le leggi razziali e la scuola*, in N. Raponi (ed.), *Scuola e Resistenza*, Parma, La Pilotta, 1978, pp. 90-93; A. D'Orsi, *Il fascismo di Bottai*, «Il pensiero politico», 1979, 12, pp. 87-101; *La legislazione antiebraica in Italia e in Europa. Atti del Convegno nel cinquantenario delle leggi razziali (Roma, 17-18 ottobre 1988)*, Roma, Camera dei Deputati, 1989.

¹² See M. Galfré, *Il regime degli editori. Libri, scuola e fascismo*, cit., p. 154. See also Ead., *Una riforma alla prova. La scuola media di Gentile e il fascismo*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2000; Ead., *Cuoco, Gentile e la scuola Fascista*, «Contemporanea», 4 (2001), 3, pp. 475-495; Ead., *La disciplina della libertà. Sull'adozione dei testi nella scuola Fascista*, cit., pp. 407-438.

case to note the vigorous process of commercial and production modernisation which was made necessary by the larger dimensions and the new directions of the market and which would characterise school publishing throughout the course of the twenty year Fascist period and which made possible the definitive overcoming of nineteenth century logic and structures¹³. With reference to the new editorial market's equilibriums produced by the Gentile Reform, Giorgio Chiosso has recently underlined that:

The inflexible determination of Gentile and Lombardo Radice produced [...] a certain disruption of the market, traditionally somewhat resistant to change and at times more ready to recycle successful texts rather than publish new ones. Some publishing houses result to be particularly hit by negative judgement. Of the 15 texts presented by the publishing house Carabba, for example, only 3 of them were approved, and even the more famous publishers such as Paravia, Bemporad and Vallardi saw themselves drastically refused books and others approved only with great reserve. Some of the weaker companies were forced out of the market as a consequence and the stronger ones were forced to quickly renew their catalogue, and to search for new authors, but above all to invest enormous sums of money. Finally, others gave up the market of the elementary schools altogether. In some cases, however, the results were unexpectedly favourable, suddenly opening substantial opportunities for new names such as, for example, Mondadori and Vallecchi which were immediately able to offer a good selection of approved volumes which were competitive not only in terms of quality but also on an editorial level¹⁴.

But also on a purely educational front, the Reform of 1923 triggered a mechanism of transformation destined to well exceed the expectations and the objectives of its promoters due to the inevitable involvement with other variables among which, for example, the internal logic of the regime and the complex mechanisms which presided over the production system and the editorial market. In some cases, it is possible to talk about a sort of *heterogenesis of the aims*, of which the perception by contemporaries can also be retraced in the correspondence between Giovanni Gentile and Giuseppe Lombardo Radice¹⁵.

It is worth remembering in fact, that the Gentile Reform and the decisions taken from 1923 onwards with respect to school publishing and textbooks represent both the result and the solution – a solution at times partial and non-definitive, at times even problematic, but however, differentiated according to

¹³ About these aspects, and the more general logics of the twentieth century, see the contributions collected in G. Chiosso (ed.), *Il libro per la scuola tra Sette e Ottocento*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2000; and Id., *Il libro per la scuola tra Otto e Novecento*, in G. Chiosso, (ed.), *TESEO. Tipografi e editori scolastico-educativi dell'Ottocento*, cit., pp. XI-XXVIII.

¹⁴ G. Chiosso, *La riforma Gentile e i contraccolpi sull'editoria scolastica*, in C. Betti, ed., *Percorsi del libro per la scuola fra Otto e Novecento. La tradizione toscana e le nuove realtà del primo Novecento in Italia*, cit., pp. 175-195.

¹⁵ See: Giuseppe Lombardo Radice to Giovanni Gentile, 15th November 1928, in Archivio della Fondazione Giovanni Gentile per gli studi filosofici, Roma, cart. *Giuseppe Lombardo Radice a Giovanni Gentile*. But, in this connection, see the entire correspondence between Giuseppe Lombardo Radice and Giovanni Gentile from the last months of 1924.

whether one is talking about the elementary school or the institutes of secondary education – of a series of unresolved and problematic knots which had crossed through all of the post-unification period. It is enough to think of, for example, of the question – object of many discussions at the end of the 1880's – of the introduction of forms of control on the production of school books and their adoption, also in order to limit the «tropical richness of the flora of the books» declared by the Central Commission for textbooks in 1883¹⁶. Not to mention the age old questions relative to the overcoming of the dimensions of local interests and the fragmentation of the editorial market, and those relating to the backwardness of the production systems and the distribution networks of editorial products for the schools. All problems which had weighed and continued to weigh heavily on the process of elementary literacy and schooling of the masses as in the case of the question of the high cost of books (*caro-libri*)¹⁷.

The analysis of the strategies proposed by Giovanni Gentile and then by the Fascist regime regarding both the production and the re-organisation of the book market as well as the ideological control of textbooks and school manuals allows us to throw light upon some problematic knots and some basic characteristics of school policies implemented during the twenty year Fascist period. In first place it is opportune to examine the different approaches used with respect to school publishing and textbooks relating to the elementary schools as well as secondary schools: two environments characterised by different strategies and paths, even if tightly interwoven but destined to produce results in many ways analogous.

2. From the textbooks for the elementary school recommended by the Central Commission of Giuseppe Lombardo Radice to the State Single Text

With regard to the elementary school, as noted, we move from the work of the Central Commission for the examination of textbooks to the introduction of the Single Text of the State (*Testo unico di Stato*), along a path characterised by preventive censorship with its disruptive consequences not only on a political-ideological level but also on the redefinition of the editorial balance and on the traditional order of the textbooks' production and distribution¹⁸.

In fact, the Royal Decree of 11th March 1923 established that the textbooks

¹⁶ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Commissione sopra i libri di testo per le scuole elementari e popolari, per le scuole tecniche e normali, per gl'istituti tecnici e per le scuole ginnasiali e liceali, *Relazione generale a S.E. il Ministro Presidente del Consiglio Superiore della Pubblica Istruzione*, Tip. Ippolito Sciolla, Roma, 1883.

¹⁷ See M. Galfré, *Il regime degli editori. Libri, scuola e fascismo*, cit., pp. 3-29.

¹⁸ See G. Chiosso, *L'editoria scolastica prima e dopo la riforma Gentile*, cit., pp. 411-434.

for the elementary school were to be judged by a Regional Commission and approved by the respective educational superintendents. During the transitory period, a Central Commission nominated by the Ministry of Education would approve the lists of texts for the school years 1923-24 and 1924-25¹⁹.

Taking office in the following weeks, the Central Commission – headed by the General Director of elementary education Giuseppe Lombardo Radice and composed of teachers, men of culture and Ministry officials – worked at a rapid rhythm concluding its work 14 months later²⁰. First of all, the commissioners examined the textbooks considered complementary and primary books (history, geography, grammar, maths and book-keeping, various notions etc.), and then the reading books.

The first partial report, relating to history and geography books, edited by Giuseppe Prezzolino and including a list of approved and rejected books, saw the light in June 1923²¹. After that, a report followed on maths and accountancy books prepared by Michele Cipolla²²; then, the report on religious texts, drawn up by a special sub-commission and headed by Lombardo Radice²³; and then, the report on the primers, which was supervised by Lorenzo Sferra Carini²⁴; again, the report on school texts in use in the new provinces annexed

¹⁹ Royal Decree 11th March 1923, n. 737, *Norme per l'adozione dei libri di testo nelle scuole elementari e popolari pubbliche e private* («Bollettino Ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1923, n. 18, pp. 1404-1407).

²⁰ At the end of its work the central Commission for textbooks, set up in 1923 by the Minister Gentile, was composed in the following manner: G. Lombardo Radice (president), A. Salvagnini (vice-president), B. Amorosa, F. Bianchi, P. Calamandrei, L. Coglitore, G. Gabrielli, G. Genocchi, O. Giacobbe, O. Maoli, O. Marella, A. Marcucci, A. Michieli, L. Mottura, N. Padellaro, M. Pezzé Pascolato, G. Piacentini, G. Prezzolini, G. Ruberti, L. Sferra Carini, O. Trippodo, P. Ubaldi.

²¹ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari e popolari ed elenco dei libri approvati. I. Libri di testo per l'insegnamento della storia e della geografia*, «Bollettino Ufficiale del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione», 1923, supplemento 2° al n. 26, pp. 5-46; Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari ed elenco dei libri approvati e dei libri respinti. II. Libri per l'insegnamento della storia e della geografia. Supplemento al 1° Elenco (libri approvati) e 2° Elenco (libri respinti)*, Roma, Stabilimento Poligrafico per l'Amministrazione dello Stato, 1924.

²² Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari ed elenco dei libri approvati e dei libri respinti. III. Libri per l'insegnamento dell'aritmetica*, Roma, Tipografia Operaia Romana Cooperativa, 1923.

²³ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari ed elenco dei libri approvati e dei libri respinti. IV. Libri per l'insegnamento della religione*, Roma, Stabilimento Poligrafico per l'Amministrazione dello Stato, 1924. It is worth mentioning that the text of the report had already appeared, in the previous months, on the pages of the journal «La Nuova Scuola Italiana», published by Ernesto Codignola. See *Relazione della commissione esaminatrice dei testi di religione*, «La Nuova Scuola Italiana», 3 febbraio 1924, n. 19, pp. 2-6.

²⁴ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari ed elenco dei libri approvati e dei libri respinti*.

after the war of 1915-18, which had among the compilers Maria Pezzè Pascolato, Giovanni Maver e Aurelio Palmieri²⁵; the report on reading books, which was supervised by Maria Pezzè Pascolato²⁶; and finally, the report on books about various notions, physical and natural sciences, grammar, hygiene and home economics²⁷, was released. In September 1924, the Central Commission headed by Giuseppe Lombardo Radice presented its final report which was then published in May of the following year (1925)²⁸.

Called to examine and to screen a vast and extremely varied production of textbooks, in which there were texts whose first edition had appeared in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and which had then been re-printed several times, alongside others which had been published in the period of Giolitti or immediately after the First World War, the Central Commission nominated by the Minister Gentile worked with great determination in order to orientate on all levels (publishers, editors of textbooks, teachers who were called upon to use them etc.) the production and the use of the school book and to impose a new typology of texts in which the pedagogy and didactical directions and the ideal of the elementary school that were at the base of the Gentile Reform of 1923²⁹ were reflected.

VI. *Relazione sui libri di testo 'Sussidiarii' e supplemento alle relazioni sui testi di religione e di aritmetica*, Roma, Libreria dello Stato, April 1924.

²⁵ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui testi scolastici in uso nelle nuove province*, Roma, Stabilimento Poligrafico per l'Amministrazione dello Stato, 1924.

²⁶ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari ed elenco dei libri approvati e dei libri respinti*. VII. *Relazione sui libri di testo di lettura*, Roma, Libreria dello Stato, August 1924.

²⁷ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari ed elenco dei libri approvati e dei libri respinti*. VIII. *Relazione sui libri di testo per le nozioni varie, le scienze fisiche e naturali, l'igiene ecc. e per la grammatica. Supplemento alla relazione sui libri di storia e geografia, di aritmetica, sui libri di religione, sui libri sussidiari e sui libri di lettura*, Roma, Libreria dello Stato, January 1925.

²⁸ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari ed elenco dei libri approvati e dei libri respinti*. IX. *Relazione finale della Commissione ed elenco dei libri esaminati nelle sessioni di agosto e settembre 1924*, Roma, Libreria dello Stato, May 1925. In November 1924, the Minister of Education published the complete list of textbooks which had been approved by the Central Commission for the school year 1924-25. See Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Elenchi per la scelta dei libri di testo*, Roma, Libreria dello Stato, November 1924.

²⁹ See G. Lombardo Radice, *La riforma della scuola elementare. Vita nuova della Scuola del Popolo*, Palermo, Sandron, 1925, pp. LXI-LXI. Whilst retracing, *a posteriori*, the various phases of the school reform of 1923, Giuseppe Lombardo Radice wrote that: «One of the most singular novelties of the primary school reform, which I believe to be unprecedented in our tradition, was the direct and continuous connection between the reform activity of the Minister and the activity of publishers and producers of material for schools [...]. Who reforms must look at the real world. *Sic et nunc* – the reformer said – the didactical reality of the Italian school is especially made of these two elements: programmes and publishers. Reforming programmes in useless, without

The Central Commission was concerned not only with the contents and formative models conveyed, but also with the correctness and vivacity of the language used in the textbooks, their layout, the presence or not and the quality of illustrations and more generally to their iconographical apparatus: and at the same time, the capacity of the texts to fully involve the student and to create excitement in him or her for the subject, by virtue of a constant adherence to his or her interior world and to the psychological dynamism of subjects in age of development. Moving from a similar approach the Commission headed by Lombardo Radice worked solidly, as everybody knows, and laying bare the serious deficiencies which existed in the content and on a formal front, as well as the inconsistencies which were present under a didactical and educational profile in a large part of the editorial production examined. As regards reading books, as known, of the 459 texts presented by the publishers, even 222 were refused by the Commission for once and for all. The remaining 237 were subdivided into five categories (which then became four in the report which was sent to the Ministry of Education):

To the first group (books which merit top marks for their artistic and didactical value and already answering well to the new programmes) – we read in the *Report on reading Books* – the Commission has assigned 32 works. Of these the weakest must still in some part be revised with respect to the programmes and re-presented within a year for a simple check of the modifications undergone. To the second group (books judged to be good and worthy of much attention, according to that which results from individual judgements, but which need a larger elaboration in harmony with the programmes; and which can be adopted for the school year 1924-25, but which need to be re-presented within a year for the final judgement) the Commission has assigned 77 works. To the third group (of worthy books but which have not been accepted as school books in day elementary schools, however they are recognised as useful or as bonus books or for popular libraries or as texts for schools of a particular character) the Commission has assigned 32 works. To the fourth group (books judged to be in some ways good, but which cannot stay in schools not even for a transitory period due to some serious gaps or flaws, which result from individual opinions; and which can be presented as reading books within a year, revised and corrected, but in the new exam they will be considered as books of new production) 16 works. To the fifth group (books which have many or some good qualities, but also various defects to amend; they may remain in schools for the period 1924-25 where they are already been adopted, but they must be completely and notably renewed) 80 works were assigned³⁰.

reforming... publishers, or better still the production of books. In order to implement programmes it was necessary first of all to *stop* the somewhat chaotic production of the didactical aids, even before the programmes were known, and to make provisional adoptions, in order to avoid a high number of printed copies: something which would constitute a strong economic obstacle for the didactical reform, since the same implementation of the programmes would be heavily conditioned by the fact that it could cause the failure of a large part of the publishing industry, together with a general crisis in the printing industry» (*ibid.*, pp. LXI-LXII).

³⁰ Before being officially published by the Ministry of Public Education, the text of the *Relazione sui libri di lettura* came out, in a version equipped with statistical data, in «L'Educazione Nazionale», the journal edited by Giuseppe Lombardo Radice. See *La Relazione Pezzè Pascolato*

Equally decisive was the judgement concerning the texts for history and geography. Of the 317 volumes examined, 212 were approved and 9 were refused for once and for all; 71 were accepted temporarily only for the school year 1924-25, but they were obliged to re-present themselves for final approval after having undergone the modifications indicated by the Commission³¹.

Even more rigorous was the selection used in judging the primary books, the maths and book-keeping texts, as well as the religious books. The first ones – that is the primers – were judged as a whole, with the exception of a few «pedantic books, full of information and therefore full of lacunae, which suffocated the natural vivacity of youth», and for these reasons the majority were refused. As regards the maths and accountancy books, the Commission headed by Lombardo Radice judged that «a good half of them did not correspond to the precepts of healthy didactics, deficient in both their expositive form and correct language»³².

As already noted, Regional Commissions should have sub-entered, as foreseen by the Royal Decree 11th March 1923, in place of the Central Commission for textbooks headed by Lombardo Radice. However, they were never instituted. In fact, it was preferred to continue to reserve to the Central Commission, nearly totally renewed in its components, the work of examining the textbooks and of compiling, year by year, the list of the approved texts³³. Little more than a year later, with the Royal Decree of 7th January 1926, they proceeded likewise with the reorganisation of the Central Commission, which apart from the president and vice-president also contained seven members chosen «from the administrative functionaries of the Ministry, from teachers of every level and grade dependent on the Ministry, from school inspectors and didactical directors and elementary teachers»³⁴.

sui libri di lettura per le scuole elementari, «L'Educazione Nazionale», VI (1924), nn. IV-V, pp. 221-250 (from which we quote). The passage quoted here, can be found at pp. 239-240.

³¹ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari e popolari ed elenco dei libri approvati*. I. *Libri di testo per l'insegnamento della storia e della geografia*, pp. 5-46; Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari ed elenco dei libri approvati e dei libri respinti*. II. *Libri per l'insegnamento della storia e della geografia. Supplemento al 1° Elenco (libri approvati) e 2° Elenco (libri respinti)*, pp. 4-24.

³² See Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari ed elenco dei libri approvati e dei libri respinti*. VI. *Relazione sui libri di testo «Sussidiarii» e supplemento alle relazioni sui testi di religione e di aritmetica*, p. 5-6. But see also: *Rapporto del Direttore generale sui libri sussidiarii respinti dalla Commissione*, that Lombardo Radice sent to the Minister of Public Education Giovanni Gentile, and which is enclosed to *Relazione sui libri di testo «Sussidiarii»* (*ibid.*, pp. 13-24).

³³ See Ministerial Circular 7th July 1924, n. 68 – *Scelta dei libri di testo per le scuole elementari*, «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Bollettino Ufficiale», 22 luglio 1924, parte prima, n. 30, p. 1674.

³⁴ Royal Decree-Law 7th January 1926, n. 209 – *Disposizioni sui libri di testo ed altri provvedimenti per l'istruzione elementare*, «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Bollettino Ufficiale», 23

Finally with the Royal Decree 22nd May 1927, the composition of the organism for the valuation of textbooks for elementary schools was newly modified: the members were reduced to five, one of which was directly appointed by the president of the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB)³⁵.

The new Central Commission which was nominated by the Ministerial Decree of 15th January 1925 and entrusted to the presidency of the pedagogue Giovanni Vidari³⁶ found itself substantially working as a sort of *court of appeal* with respect to the Commission of 1923 which had been led by Lombardo Radice. In fact, of the more than 1,300 volumes which were subjected to his judgement, a good part was made up of «returning books, to be checked or revised, for the exam» after having been provisionally approved or refused by the previous Commission. «The final result of our work – wrote Vidari with regard to this matter in the conclusive report of the work of the Commission, which was released on the 21st July 1925 – can be reassured with these figures: Examined books – no. 1,326. Approved – no. 949. Disapproved – no. 277. The number of the approved books is therefore especially high: evident proof that the production of Italian texts is improving»³⁷.

Caught between the need to «proceed bearing in mind the judgements of the preceding Commission» and the need to «leave to the new judges that liberty which was asked for from their scientific, literary or scientific character»³⁸, the Commission of Vidari worked substantially in continuation with that which had been headed by Lombardo Radice, using in almost every case the same indications and the criteria of judgement which had been used by the preceding organism. We find confirmation of this, first of all in the judgement made regarding the books which had already been reviewed in 1923-24, the

febbraio 1926, parte prima, n. 8, pp. 595-598; and Ministerial Ordinance 16th February 1926 – *Scelta dei libri di testo da adottarsi nelle scuole elementari*, *ibid.*, pp. 760-761.

³⁵ Royal Decree 22nd May 1927, n. 850 – *Disposizioni per la scelta dei libri di testo per le scuole elementari*, «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Bollettino Ufficiale», 21 giugno 1927, parte prima, n. 25, pp. 2282-2283.

³⁶ Ministerial Decree 15th January 1925 – *Norme per l'esame dei libri di testo per le scuole elementari*, «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Bollettino Ufficiale», 27 gennaio 1925, parte prima, n. 4, pp. 249-253. The new central Commission for the selection of textbooks was established in 1925 and headed by Giovanni Vidari, and its members were as follows: Alberto Salvagnini (vice-president), Giulia Alessandrini, Ernesto Boezi, Giuseppe Brucchiotti, Carlo Calcagni, Giovanni Di Giusto, Giovanni Di Tommaso, Silvia Doglia, Maria Gazagne Ambrosi, p. Giovanni Genocchi, Enrico Giachi, Giuseppe Giovannazzi, p. Giovanni Giovannozzi, Balbino Giuliano, Salvator Gotta, Pasquale Grossi, Mario Labroca, Marino Lazzari, Anna Levi Piva, Felice Mastruzzo, Hilda Montesi Festa, Efisio Oppo Cipriano, Antonio Pagano, Alfredo Perna, Antonio Ranucci, Carlo Rubbia, Vincenzo Salcito, Alfredo Saraz, Achille Sclavo, Annita Solina, Riccardo Truffi, Lorenzo Viani, Oreste Vocca, Rodolfo Zorzut, Giuseppe Scarascia (secretary).

³⁷ See *Relazione della Commissione ministeriale per l'esame dei libri di testo da adottarsi nelle scuole elementari* [Commissione Vidari], «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Bollettino Ufficiale», 23 febbraio 1926, parte prima, n. 8, pp. 616-759; the cited quote, can be found at p. 628.

³⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 616-617.

majority of which reproduced the same ones which had been favoured by the preceding Commission, or they verified the point of reception of the proposals for modification which had been forwarded. It is not by chance that the more frequent valuations we find in the final report of Vidari, reproduced with little change the statement: «we confirm the judgement expressed by the preceding Commission and we approve definitively of it as a reading book»; or: «the particular praise attributed to the reading course by the preceding Commission was truly merited»³⁹. And so forth.

Even with regards to the new books which appeared between 1924 and 1925, the Vidari Commission used the same criteria of judgement already previously used. It is symptomatic, for example, that in more than two thirds of the judgements given, the more or less dominating «sentiment for the country», and the adequate space given to the subject of the «national Risorgimento» and «the last War of liberation», with their appendix of heroes and their great achievements, built the principal criterion of discrimination for the approval or dismissal of textbooks⁴⁰.

In the final report drawn up by Giovanni Vidari, we notice not only the renewal but also the significant development of the ideological motivations which had inspired the Commission headed by Lombardo Radice, especially where the «lay culture of the homeland» and the exaltation of the Great War as «complement to the process of national liberation» were re-proposed as a foundation for a civil education of the «new» Italian youth:

The great fact of the War, bravely fought and gloriously won – we read in *Relazione* by Vidari –, makes up the background in which the reasons for a patriotic education emerge in the best light: the main events of the war, the final victory, the glorious martyrs, are almost always remembered [...]. And the graveyards of the war, the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Altar of the Homeland are always presented as educational pilgrimages, as sacred endings, whose cult and piety the Italians will forever turn to. Even the significance of the war as a magnificent crowning of a century of efforts of redemption of the country [...], as is the greatest collective expression of the moral energy of the Italians appears touched here and there. We hold that such a significance not only will easily emerge from the spoken word of the teacher [...], but will also clear itself little by little in the same conscience of the students⁴¹.

In order to see appear a clear and direct reference to Fascism, and more in general, a specific call to the principles and ideals of the Mussolini regime, it is necessary to take into consideration the documentation produced by the Central Commissions instituted in 1926 and 1927 and headed respectively by Bal-

³⁹ See for example, the judgements about the textbooks by Luigi Capuana, Franco Ciarlantini, Giovanni Capodivacca, Giuseppe Fanciulli, Ciro Trabalza (*ibid.*, pp. 636, 640, 647, 680).

⁴⁰ In connection to this, see the files containing the judgements about the single textbooks which were examined by the Commission, *ibid.*, pp. 630-759.

⁴¹ See *ibid.*, p. 620.

bino Giuliano, who was already the education superintendent of Lombardy and undersecretary in the Ministry of Education along with the Minister Alessandro Casati⁴², and by Michele Romano, who succeeded Giuliano as undersecretary after Pietro Fedele came to the direction of the Minerva⁴³.

In reality the call to Fascism and the «legitimate aspirations of the National Government» did not represent a break – almost a traumatic inversion of tendency – with respect to the directions expressed by preceding Commissions, in as much as a development, or if one prefers an intensification, of themes and ideological reasons already emerged in the past⁴⁴. It is not by chance that, whilst explaining the basic directions which had orientated the choices of the Commission in 1926, the age old collaborator of Gentile, Balbino Giuliano, on the one hand claimed a «substantial continuity of intent» with the Commissions of Lombardo Radice and Vidari, and on the other, in order to protect the most authentic significance of the reform of Gentile, underlined the opportunity to put to work an indispensable coming together of the «principal Italian ideals» and the political ideology of which the Fascist regime had made itself representative⁴⁵.

It also deserves to be noted that from this combination of the «national ideal» and «Fascist ideology», the Commission of 1926 drew a singular criterion for the valuation of the textbooks, on the basis of which the absence or the lack of references to experience and the realisation of Fascism finished, in fact, in representing a sort of significant indication of a patriotism which, far from rising to be an «authentic faith», revealed itself little more than a «rhetoric illusion». So, as Balbino Giuliano concluded in his *Report*, in many of the «books presented to the Commission for examination, that sentiment of love for Italy and that fervid cult of her glory is missing [...]. Too often even the men of good faith reveal in their books a certain preoccupation with not mentioning Fascism»⁴⁶.

⁴² On the figure and work of Balbino Giuliano, see in particular: M. Ostenc, *Una tappa della Fascistizzazione: la scuola e la politica dal 1925 al 1928*, «Storia contemporanea», 4, 1973, pp. 481-505; V. Del Nero, *La scuola elementare nell'Italia Fascista. Dalle circolari ministeriali 1922-1943*, Roma, Armando, 1988, pp. 46-48 and *passim*; J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit., pp. 212-214 and *passim*. See the same Giuliano's works: B. Giuliano, *La politica scolastica del governo nazionale*, Milano, Alpes, 1924; Id., *L'esperienza politica dell'Italia*, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1924; Id., *Conversazioni storiche*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1943.

⁴³ On the figure and work of Michele Romano see J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit., pp. 213-214 and *passim*.

⁴⁴ *Relazione della Commissione Ministeriale per l'esame dei libri di testo da adottarsi nelle scuole elementari e nei corsi integrativi d'avviamento professionale* [Commissione Giuliano], «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Bollettino Ufficiale», 21 dicembre 1926, parte prima, n. 51, pp. 3208-3313 (the quote can be found at p. 3208).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 3209-3210.

⁴⁶ Again Balbino Giuliano wrote: «When the aim to prepare the pupil to bear subversive propaganda is lacking, then often also that vivid feeling of love for Italy and that fervent worship of her glories are lacking, which we should aim to impress upon the souls of the primary school chil-

On the same explanatory line traced by the Commission of Giuliano, but with greater determination, was the approach of the Central Commission set up in 1927. In this case the previously established combination between «national ideal» and «Fascist ideology» led to all effects to a real identification and rose to be a principal criterion for the valuation of textbooks⁴⁷. If it were in fact, true, as noted in the final *Report* drawn up by Michele Romano that «the book written for the elementary school» should not only answer «in a literal manner, but fully reflect the spirit of the programme», it appeared necessary that, apart from «being deeply educational», it should fit «perfectly in the historical climate in which and of which the nation lives». From here, according to the Romano Commission, the need to «inculcate, through textbooks», that «fascist spirit» which, opportunely «cultivated in childhood and in the adolescence», would have led to «the effective formation of that method of life and that new man, that the Country expects above all from the renewed school»⁴⁸. Based on these intents the Romano Commission declared its dissatisfaction with many parts of «books under examination, which lack this Fascist spirit»; in particular for the reading books and the small manuals of history which they considered to be not the «product of a high and pure intelligence and of a sincere faith», but the expression of a «a new and no less detestable form of rhetoric»⁴⁹.

In reality there were different needs and reasons at the root of the dissatisfaction noted above. One to especially note, was the wish to accentuate the link between «patriotic education» and the «Fascist spirit», to the point of identifying in this last one the most authentic and mature work of the first, and to consider the first – the «patriotic education» – effectively realisable only

dren in the strongest way possible, if we consider that the great part of them abandon their studies after the primary course, and that they carry with them the impression of those first unchanged teachings for their entire life. Still too often however, among warm expressions of patriotism, emerge remainders of that old falsely democratic conception, made of passive neutralism and levelling mechanism, which has smoothed the way for socialism and its delirious attempts of destruction; remains of a pacifism which is not the wise aspiration of a realistic peace of Latin tradition, which represents the defence of the work done for the human progress, but which is simply utilitarian cowardice painted with eastern religiosity or northern moralism; remains of a kind of whiny and Protestant rationalism, which – following its own materialistic conception of tangible political problems – has forgotten that the first, the most concrete and urgent problem was to save Italy, to give back Italian people first of all the strength to walk, and then the awareness of themselves and of their value» (*ibid.*, pp. 3210-3211).

⁴⁷ In this connection, see what has been written – after a deep analysis of non-school sources – by E. Gentile in *Il culto del Littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia Fascista*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1993, pp. 16-17 and *passim*.

⁴⁸ *Relazione della Commissione Ministeriale centrale per l'esame dei libri di testo da adottarsi nelle scuole elementari e nei corsi integrativi di avviamento professionale* [Commissione Romano], «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Bollettino Ufficiale», 4 ottobre 1927, parte prima, n. 40, pp. 3333-3372 (the quotes are at p. 3334-3335).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3335-3336.

with the help of didactic instruments and formatives inspired by an authentic «Fascist spirit». Not by chance, in the denouncing of the weaknesses of the history manuals examined, the opportunity was underlined that the books, going «beyond the limits of the programme which stopped in 1918», gave sufficient allowance «for the spiritual movement, maker of Fascism», and moved from the commemoration of the «Fascist martyrology, so intimately linked with the martyrology of war»⁵⁰.

The issues raised by the Romano Commission regarding the opportunity of a greater conformity of textbooks to the Fascist spirit were maybe the reflection of an overriding and undelayable need for the Mussolini regime: this was confirmed by the fact that, after only a few months, the Royal Decree 18th March 1928 was promulgated, in which the art. 1 stated that: «the textbooks of history, geography, literature, economics and law for the elementary schools and for the integrative courses of professional formation must – within the framework of current programmes – answer the historical, political, legal and economical needs affirmed from April 28th 1922 onwards»⁵¹.

In virtue of the provisions of the Royal Decree 18th March 1928, the new Central Commission, which took office in the following weeks and was headed by the vice-secretary of the National Fascist Party Alessandro Melchiori⁵², excluded from its examination reading books whose renewal of adoption had been put off, and limited the analysis only to primers and complementary texts, first of all the «history, geography, law and economics books»⁵³.

The judgement formed by the Melchiori Commission regarding the textbooks examined was, on the whole, negative: «The examination so far carried out – we read in the *Relazione* – has given generally unfavourable results». With regard to this, not only did «the new history and geography texts» have «as a whole defects or serious deficiencies», but they were also far from corresponding to «the historical, political, legal and economical needs» which were affirmed in Italy «the following day with the march to Rome». Furthermore, «the texts previously approved, put to a new revision», had «revealed notable

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3335.

⁵¹ Royal Decree 18th March 1928, n. 780 – *Disposizioni relative ai libri di testo per le scuole elementari*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 23 aprile 1928, n. 95; published in «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Bollettino Ufficiale», 1 maggio 1928, parte prima, n. 18, pp. 1569-1571.

⁵² About the figure and work of Alessandro Melchiori see J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, pp. 398-399. The Central Commission for the textbooks, which was established in 1928 and headed by Alessandro Melchiori, was made of the following members: Luigi Valli, Vincenzo Bianchi Cagliesi, Eugenio Canepa, Arnaldo Monti, Francesco di Pretoro, Costantino Cologna, Giuseppe D'Asdia, Gerardo Di Salia, Aristide Loyola, Nazareno Padellaro.

⁵³ *Relazione della Commissione per l'esame dei libri di testo da adottarsi nelle scuole elementari e nei corsi integrativi di avviamento professionale* [Commissione Melchiori], «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Bollettino Ufficiale», 18 settembre 1928, parte prima, n. 38, pp. 3160-3170 (the quote is at p. 3160).

deficiencies», to the point of resulting «unsuitable to the spiritual formation of the Italian youth because they were weak in the national and Fascist spirit». On this basis, the Melchiori Commission declared to have «found itself in the painful situation to have not been able to choose, from the numerous volumes presented to the exam, any book which corresponded perfectly to the needs of a Fascist school and which merited full approval»⁵⁴.

In the final part of his *Relazione*, Alessandro Melchiori expresses his satisfaction for the decision of the government to «finally supply elementary schools with State textbooks»⁵⁵, and it confirms the hypothesis that, in the moment in which the last Central Commission for the examination of textbooks started its work (1928), the decision of the Fascist regime to introduce the State single text to elementary schools was already definitively underway, and that the same deliberation adopted by the Melchiori Commission only served to further legitimise such a step⁵⁶.

In November 1928, the Minister of Education Giuseppe Belluzzo presented Mussolini with the directives for the compilation of State single texts, which had been elaborated by a Commission set up by the Ministry in the previous months⁵⁷. The objective of the new texts, whose drawing up was to be entrusted to «eminent characters in the field of school and study», was that of «promoting amongst the youth a purely Fascist education and culture»⁵⁸.

With the law of the 7th January 1929, which introduced the State single text to elementary schools starting from the school year 1930-1931⁵⁹, the activity

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3161-3162.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3162.

⁵⁶ As well known, since the 13rd May 1926, with his speech at the Chamber of Deputies during the debate on the Ministry of Public Education's budget, Mussolini had made clear the government's will to introduce the State single textbook in the primary schools («We will make a State textbook [...]. We will make five or six fundamental State textbooks»). Two days later, on 15th May 1926, the Minister of Public Education Pietro Fedele told the Parliament that he had been charged by the head of government to prepare the related act (*Atti Parlamentari, Camera, Legislazione XXVII, Discorsi*, vol. 6, see respectively at pp. 5713 and 5783). The introduction of the State single text in the primary schools was officially announced the day after that Giuseppe Belluzzo became the Minister of Public Education (9th July 1928). This was one of a series of school policy's measures which would contribute – according to the new minister – to «realize the *fascistisation* of the school» (see Belluzzo's statements during the Council of Ministers on 25th September 1928, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato [from now on: ACS], *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Atti*, busta 100, fasc. 26).

⁵⁷ About the preparation of the State single textbooks for the various primary courses, see: M. Bacigalupi, P. Fossati, *Da plebe a popolo. L'educazione popolare nei libri di scuola dall'Unità d'Italia alla Repubblica*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1986, pp. 164-187; J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit., pp. 393-408; G. Ricuperati, *La scuola italiana durante il fascismo*, in L. Pazzaglia, R. Sani (eds.), *Scuola e società nell'Italia unita. Dalla Legge Casati al Centro-Sinistra*, cit., pp. 264-269.

⁵⁸ Giuseppe Belluzzo to Benito Mussolini, 29th November 1928, in ACS, *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Gabinetto (1928-1930)*, b. 5/3, n. 4023.

⁵⁹ Law 7th January 1929, n. 5 – *Norme per la compilazione e l'adozione del testo unico di Stato per le singole classi elementari*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 12 gennaio 1929, n. 10;

of the Central Commission for the examination of textbooks, which had started six years earlier with the reform plan for Italian schools set up by Giovanni Gentile, was finally concluded⁶⁰.

Generally, the change represented by the introduction to the elementary schools of the State single text was destined to form an effective element of discontinuity – if not a true break – in comparison with the propositions and choices which had characterised the work of Gentile and Lombardo Radice. If we examine closer the genesis and the directions expressed by the Central Commission for the examination of textbooks in the period between 1923 and 1928, the picture which emerges seems characterised by a greater complexity and fluidity. For that which concerns the original project, for example, there is no doubt that the choice made by the government to take upon itself, through a specially provided commission nominated by the Ministry, the work of selecting textbooks for the elementary school, was destined to set the premise for a kind of direct and exclusive control of the state authority on educational publishing. A control, let's get this clear, that only partially was eased by the presence in the Ministerial Commission – at least in 1923-24 (the Commission of Lombardo Radice) and in 1925 (the Commission of Vidari) – of expert pedagogists, men from the world of the school, and experts of didactics and literature for the young.

In reality, the deprivation of authority in the traditional liberty of choice of textbooks by the teachers, and, at the same time, the supremacy conferred to the State as organiser of the school and education in view of an ever growing realisation of the values of a national cultural and of the life associated to it, did in fact contribute to preparing the way for the following change, which culminated towards the end of the 1920's with the introduction of a State single text by the Fascist regime. A change which under certain aspects was unforeseeable, but which however, was to be found in the same logic which had fuelled the choices made by Gentile and Lombardo Radice: that of a pedagogy and didactics imposed by the coercive force of the State.

With regards to this, we could talk of a true *heterogenesis of the aims*, on the basis of which the aspirations of the idealists to make the State the instrument of a national pedagogy capable of giving shape and substance to a project of cultural and educational renewal in Italian society, finished in transforming itself into a sort of *Trojan horse*, through which the Mussolini regime was able to impose – in the name of the superior requirements of the «State

published in «Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Bollettino Ufficiale», 22 gennaio 1929, parte prima, n. 4, pp. 226-227.

⁶⁰ See G. Gentile, *Il fascismo al governo della scuola (novembre '22 – aprile '24). Discorsi e interviste raccolti e ordinati da Ferruccio Boffi*, Palermo, Sandron, 1924; G. Lombardo Radice, *La riforma della scuola elementare. Scuole, maestri e libri. Raccolta di indagini essenziali*, Palermo, Sandron, 1926.

educator» – its own conception of the textbook as a vehicle of ideological and political propaganda, and as a means to «mould the new Italian, or rather the integral Fascist»⁶¹.

Furthermore, as regards the ideological directions and the cultural and formative models advocated by the Central Commission between 1923 and 1928, the picture reveals an undoubted complexity. On the one hand, there seems to be no doubt concerning the wish of Lombardo Radice and his successor Vidari to proceed in the valuation of the textbooks on the basis of excellent pedagogic-didactic and cultural criteria, escaping from every form of political propaganda and deference to Fascism (elements, these last ones, destined to become prevalent from 1926). On the other hand however, it is clear that from 1923-24, a series of elements emerged, such as: the importance conferred to the national ideal and to the «cult of the homeland», the exaltation of the Great War as a «complement to the process of national redemption», the belittlement of democratic principles (the «inferior democracy» often stigmatised) and finally the rigid social conservatism manifested in many judgements which referred to textbooks which «slyly» fed «the class battle» and did not install in the youth of the lower classes a composed resignation in face of the inequality and injustices present in society. And these same elements, far from being reasons of discontinuity, compared to the successive results of the totalitarian pedagogy of Fascism⁶², finished in fact in constituting the essential nucleus of the proposal of «Fascist education for the youth», which was transmitted in the 1930's by the State single texts.

With regards to the contents and formative models of the State single text and its variable destiny in the Italian elementary schools, we must note, alongside the research carried out in the 1980's by Marcella Bacigalupi and Piero Fossati⁶³ as well as the precious indications which have come from more recent studies by Davide Montino⁶⁴, the large volume by Maria Cristina Morandini, whose reading offers further points of interest⁶⁵.

The research mentioned above has brought to light how the State single

⁶¹ The Minister Giuseppe Belluzzo expressed himself in this way, in the Council of Ministers on 25th September 1928, in ACS, *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Atti*, busta 100, fasc. 26.

⁶² See A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (eds.), *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo. L'opera della Commissione centrale per l'esame dei libri di testo da Giuseppe Lombardo Radice ad Alessandro Melchiori (1923-1928)*, cit., pp. 14-19.

⁶³ M. Bacigalupi, P. Fossati, *Da plebe a popolo. L'educazione popolare nei libri di scuola dall'Unità d'Italia alla Repubblica*, cit., pp. 131-150.

⁶⁴ See D. Montino, *Le parole educate. Libri e quaderni tra fascismo e Repubblica*, Milano, Selene, 2005; Id., *Libro, quaderno e moschetto. Pedagogia della guerra nelle letture e nelle scritture scolastiche durante il regime Fascista*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», II (2007), 2, pp. 193-216.

⁶⁵ M.C. Morandini, *Il libro unico di Stato in epoca Fascista: analisi dei contenuti e dei modelli formativi nei sussidiari*, in G. Chiosso (ed.), *Teseo 900*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2007, pp. LV-LXXIV.

texts were an editorial product which acknowledged many of the didactical and pedagogical requirements which had matured in the debate following the First World War, and which, guided by the indications formulated by Maria Pezzè Pascolato with respect to the work of the Central Commission of 1923-24, headed by Lombardo Radice⁶⁶, adopted modern narrative solutions: State single texts were at times very efficient and demonstrated the understanding of the importance of the setting, of the fusion of literary types, as well as of the relationship between text and illustration. In substance we are in the presence of a “pedagogically discerning” use of the ideology and propaganda.

Furthermore, if we examine the works destined to the different elementary classes, it is possible to find a certain heterogeneity of approaches and language: very efficient from this point of view, are the texts by Ornella Quercia Tanzarella for the I and the II class⁶⁷; the spelling book and the reading books by Alessandro Marcucci for the rural schools⁶⁸; those by Angiolo Silvio Novaro for the IV class and by Roberto Forges Davanzati for the V class⁶⁹; more problematic was that by Grazia Deledda for the III class, so much so that it would soon be substituted⁷⁰.

The variations and changes introduced in the course of the 1930's, to the different editions of the single school texts allow us to perceive the deep evolution and the constant updating of this editorial product. In fact, the effort made to offer a dynamic image of Fascism and its realisations is significant; at this same time the school publishing manifested a constant tension, especially from the second half of the decade, between the proposal of a heroic and war-like dimension, in which the triumphalist rhetoric of the regime transpired, and that which centred on a Fascism which identified itself with the rhythms and the experiences of every day, permeating every aspect of reality and the daily routine of the individual and the nation.

Under this profile the State single texts became carriers of an educational proposition, which, next to the militarist rhetoric of the parades of the official ceremonies, next to the slogans, the ideological callings and the exaltation of the works and realisations of the Regime, appealed to a series of values and

⁶⁶ Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – Direzione Generale dell'Istruzione Elementare, *Relazioni sui libri di testo per le scuole elementari ed elenco dei libri approvati e dei libri respinti. VII. Relazione sui libri di testo di lettura*, cit.

⁶⁷ O. Quercia Tanzarella, *Sillabario e prime letture*, Roma, La Libreria dello Stato, 1930; Ead., *Il libro della II classe*, Roma, La Libreria dello Stato, 1930.

⁶⁸ A. Marcucci, *Sillabario-scuole rurali*, Roma, La Libreria dello Stato, 1930; Id., *Il libro della seconda classe rurale*, Roma, La Libreria dello Stato, 1930.

⁶⁹ A.S. Novaro, *Il libro della IV classe elementare. Letture*, Roma, La Libreria dello Stato, 1930; R. Forges Davanzati, *Il libro della V classe elementare. Il balilla Vittorio, racconto*, Roma, La Libreria dello Stato, 1930.

⁷⁰ G. Deledda, *Il libro della terza classe elementare. Letture*, Roma, La Libreria dello Stato, 1930. Some years later the textbook of Deledda was replaced with N. Padellaro, *Il libro della terza classe elementare. Letture*, Roma, La Libreria dello Stato, 1935.

traditional models: the cult of the motherland, respect for the religion of the fathers, respect for authority, the importance of work, the sentiment for the family and the value of family virtues (with regard to this point, the “Mussolini” family became a primary representation of the ideal model, alongside with – and at times substituting – even in the iconography, the traditional confessional model of the “sacred family”), the marked and omnipresent exaltation of the rural life, which accompanied the idealised representation of the peasant world and the country life.

To all this we must add an atmosphere aimed at realising a fusion between past and present, according to a prospective which intended to affirm not so much a relationship of continuity as a sort of timelessness: the purpose was to accredit the idea of Fascism as a stable presence, all-inclusive, which was present in every part of reality: as an endless and strong fact, both in public life and private life⁷¹.

3. *The «Fascist reclamation» of the textbooks in the secondary schools*

Different, as noted previously, is the success of the textbooks in the secondary school. If on the one hand we note the missing realisation of forms of preventive control, on the other we note the beginning, already from the end of the 1920's, of an incisive and organic policy of adjusting texts to the Fascist spirit, and controlling the adoption and the choices made by the teachers. A policy which was destined to constantly increase in the following decade, in concurrence with the introduction of new programmes for the secondary schools of 1930 and 1936, works which were respectively of the Ministers Balbino Giuliano⁷² and Cesare

⁷¹ M. Bacigalupi, P. Fossati, *Da plebe a popolo. L'educazione popolare nei libri di scuola dall'Unità d'Italia alla Repubblica*, cit., pp. 201-231.

⁷² Royal Decree 5th November 1930, n. 1467 – *Modificazioni agli orari e programmi delle scuole medie*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 24 novembre 1930, n. 273, parte prima, pp. 5023-5049. See also, two decrees both published in 1933, the n. 491 of 15th May and the n. 892 of 29th June. The former one (*Approvazione dei programmi, degli orari e dei raggruppamenti di materie delle Scuole e degli Istituti d'istruzione tecnica*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 30 maggio 1933, n. 125, parte prima, suppl. ord.) contained the new programmes for technical schools, which had been promulgated by the Minister for National Education, Francesco Ercole. The latter one (*Programmi di esame per gli Istituti medi d'istruzione classica, scientifica e magistrale*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 27 luglio 1933, n. 173, parte prima, pp. 3416-3442) decreed the introduction of the new entrance examinations for the gymnasium, the liceo's first year, the teachers' training college, and the school-leaving examinations of the humanities and/or science liceos together with the teachers' training colleges. See also the Royal Decree 5th July 1934, n. 1185 – *Regolamento per i concorsi a cattedre nelle Regie scuole e nei Regi istituti d'istruzione media tecnica* e il Royal Decree 20th July 1934, n. 1186 – *Programmi per i concorsi a cattedre di Regie scuole e di Regi istituti d'istruzione tecnica*, both published in «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 28 luglio 1934, n. 176, parte prima, suppl. ord.

Maria De Vecchi di Val Cismon⁷³, and then successively, with the racial legislation of 1938⁷⁴ and the School Charter (*Carta della Scuola*) of Giuseppe Bottai (1939)⁷⁵.

With regard to this argument the resistance of the editors, the difficulties associated with the complex articulation of directions and the extreme variety of the didactical orders of the secondary school, as well as the conditioning of the market, all finally had a deep effect and made it necessary to adopt different forms of discipline and control with respect to those introduced in the elementary schools.

However, the complementary character of the interventions realised in this field by the Regime in the two types of school needs to be highlighted. In concurrence with the changes noted on the level of primary education, from the Central Commission, headed by Alessandro Melchiori (1928), the Minister for Public Education Giuseppe Belluzzo issued two important circulars relative to the textbooks for secondary education. With the first one, the C.M. 19th December 1928, the heads of schools and institutions were asked to send lists of the books which were used in their respective schools, on the basis of an extremely detailed and analytic prospect supplied directly by the Minister of Public Education: «You must personally see that – the circular affirmed – the compilation of the lists be clear, exact, complete and conform to the directions given [...]. I will not be able to allow that the responsibility of shortcomings, which should be complained about in the compilation, should fall onto the secretaries of the Institutes»⁷⁶.

With the second circular, issued a month later (C.M. 19th January 1929), the Minister Belluzzo introduced a series of dispositions with respect to the choice of textbooks on behalf of the secondary teachers:

⁷³ Royal Decree 7th May 1936, n. 762 – *Approvazione degli orari e programmi per le scuole medie d'istruzione classica, scientifica, magistrale e tecnica*, «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 9 maggio 1936, n. 108, parte prima, suppl. ord.

⁷⁴ About the consequences, on the school field, of the Royal Decree-Law 17th November 1938, n. 1728 – *Provvedimenti per la difesa della razza italiana* (in «Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia», 19th November 1938, n. 264, parte prima), and of the subsequent anti-Jewish laws, see in particular R. De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo*, cit., pp. 282-335; and J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, cit., pp. 469-483.

⁷⁵ See G. Bottai, *La Carta della Scuola*, Milano, Mondadori, 1939. See also: Id., *La Carta della Scuola. Discorso alla Camera dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni nella riunione del 3 luglio 1939*, Roma, Tipografia della Camera dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni, 1939; Id., *A un anno dalla «Carta della Scuola». Discorso alla Camera dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni nella riunione del 6 marzo 1940*, Roma, Tipografia della Camera dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni, 1940.

⁷⁶ See: Ministerial Circular 19th December 1928 – *Elenchi dei libri di testo*, in ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (from now on MPI), Direzione generale dell'istruzione classica, scientifica e magistrale, Divisione I, *Libri di testo etc.*, 1923-1959, b. 4, f. 16.

The Board of Professors – stated the circular – must adopt textbooks which conform to the directives and the institutes on which the work of the State was based from the 28th October 1922. I mean, that is, only those textbooks pertaining to the national life in every field, for their freshness of knowledge and above all for the fullness of consensus in which they adhere to the spirit and the action of the Regime, may enter the middle schools.

Furthermore:

From the way in which heads and professors apply the criteria for the choice of textbooks proposed with this circular which has been brought to their attention, I will be able to judge how the Italian middle school answers to the educational ends assigned to them by the Fascist Government⁷⁷.

Exploiting the sense of responsibility of the teachers, implicit in the faculty of choice attributed to them, in practice a permanent revision was given way to, safeguarding the formal respect for the law, whose spirit, however, was deeply altered. We can add that, with such a move, they pointed on putting pressure on the conformism of the heads and especially on the teaching bodies which worked as a sort of second court of appeal (or rather a further opinion) with respect to the autonomous choices of the individual teacher of a subject⁷⁸.

With regards to this the writings of the successor of Belluzzo at the Minerva, the new Minister Balbino Giuliano, are interesting in the Ministerial Circular of 8th May 1930, dedicated, in fact, to the *Choice and use of textbooks in the secondary institutes of education*. After having confirmed the conviction that it was necessary to maintain «integral [...] the freedom of choice of textbooks by the individual teaching bodies», Giuliano highlighted that the advantage which came from such a liberty was founded on the assumption «that the choices of the teaching bodies» were:

accurate and shrewd, so that they provide the professors and the students in the text book a common ground of understanding, rather, a sort of *joint possession* [...]. The head and the professors must take care that disharmonies, imbalances and gaps are not concealed in the field of each subject [...]. The ascertainment that the texts are everything which they should be, with regards to national life, and fully adherent to the spirit and action of the Regime, will be first made by the proponent professors, who will supply declarations corresponding to the note of the books which they will present. The teaching body itself will ascertain as to whether or not such an adherence exists, and will make known their result in the minutes of the meeting. The adherence of the text book to the spirit and action of the Fascist Regime must not result simply in a few phrases of celebration, but in an interpreta-

⁷⁷ Ministerial Circular 19th January 1929 – *Scelta dei libri di testo nelle scuole medie*, in ACS, MPI, Divisione generale dell'istruzione classica, scientifica e magistrale, Divisione I, *Libri di testo etc.*, 1923-1959, b. 4, f. 16.

⁷⁸ See the note of 19th February 1929 by the Minister Belluzzo, which he transmitted to «Ai Regi Provveditori agli Studi e ai Presidi degli Istituti medi d'istruzione» the Ministerial Circular 19th January 1929 (in ACS, MPI, Direzione generale dell'istruzione classica, scientifica e magistrale, Divisione I, *Libri di testo etc.*, 1923-1959, b. 4, f. 16).

tion of all the material in keeping with our new culture intimately and passionately Italian⁷⁹.

In substance, with the noticeable reference to the authority of the heads and to the joint responsibility and the conformism of the teaching bodies, they aimed at re-dimensioning – if not making impractical – the traditional exercise of free choice of textbooks by the individual teacher.

Starting from this moment, the lists of books adopted by every school, together with the minutes of the meetings of the teaching committees which had approved them, were subject to careful analysis by the ministerial authorities, as witnesses the correspondence of the Minister with the educational superintendents and of the superintendents with the heads of schools and institutes. From here continued the constant (and forceful) invitation to provide ever more precise and detailed lists, and to define clearly in the reports the motivations for each choice. It is necessary to note that the request for such documentation was renewed year after year, so giving the impression of a continuous control⁸⁰.

In July 1929 the Minister Belluzzo was able to inform Mussolini of the conclusions which the work of the revision of textbooks for secondary schools had produced. From the exam carried out on 513 middle and secondary schools, it resulted that the texts which were not approved, or which had to be adapted to fit the new dispositions, were almost exclusively anthologies «missing pages which reflected the last ten years of national life», history manuals which stopped with the First World War, and economy manuals which were «by now exceeded by the new Italian corporative law». «With such measures – the Minister Belluzzo triumphantly concluded – I have the guarantee that all the books which will be adopted from today onwards in the middle schools, will correspond to the needs of the most fully, severe and enlightened Fascist education of the spirits of the young who attend such schools»⁸¹.

With the coming of Cesare Maria De Vecchi di Val Cismon to head the Ministry of Education, not only a heavier ideological and political claim was staked

⁷⁹ See: Ministerial Circular 8th May 1930, n. 46 – *Scelta ed uso dei libri di testo negli istituti medi d'istruzione*, «Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale. Bollettino Ufficiale», 13 maggio 1930, I, n. 19, pp. 3-10, extract.

⁸⁰ As example, see: Ministerial Circular 28th April 1931 – *Libri di testo*, in ACS, MPI, Direzione generale dell'istruzione classica, scientifica e magistrale, Divisione I, *Libri di testo etc. (1923-1959)*, b. 4, f. 16; Ministerial Circular 6th September 1932 – *Libri di testo*, *ibid.*; Ministerial Circular 10th November 1932 – *Libri di testo*, *ibid.*; Ministerial Circular 8th May 1933 – *Scelta dei libri di testo nei Regi istituti medi di istruzione per l'anno scolastico 1933-34*, *ibid.*; Ministerial Circular 30th August 1935 – *Scelta dei libri di testo per l'anno 1935-36*, *ibid.*

⁸¹ Giuseppe Belluzzo to Benito Mussolini, 8th July 1929, in ACS, *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Gabinetto. 1928-1930*, b. 5/3, n. 5696; see the draft, equipped with autograph corrections, which is kept in ACS, MPI, Direzione generale dell'istruzione classica, scientifica e magistrale, Divisione I, *Libri di testo etc., 1923-1959*, b. 4, f. 16.

on the didactical direction and on the cultural contents of the secondary school through the launch of new didactical programmes (May 1936), but also the basis was laid for an administrative centralisation which was destined to reverberate even on the question of the adoption of textbooks⁸².

It is well noted, and Monica Galfré has clearly highlighted, the tentative made by De Vecchi to exert a tighter control on school book publishing and in particular on the Florentine publishers (Le Monnier, Sansoni ecc.), which were directly influenced by Giovanni Gentile and his supporters. Also well known is the fact that with the new programmes for the middle schools given out in 1936, conceived as teaching programmes and no longer as exams, the Minister gave the go ahead to an incisive rationalisation of the book market, which was destined on the one hand to put the different publishing houses in crisis and on the other to impose a tight dependency of the publishers on the ministerial apparatus and therefore on the government⁸³.

Less known seems to be the fact that, with the coming of De Vecchi to the direction of the Ministry of Education, a real change was registered, with respect to the policies concerning the choice of books for secondary schools, which until then had been undertaken by the Fascist regime. With the Royal Decree – Law 26th September 1935, n. 1845, in fact, a «Central Commission [...] for the preventive revision of textbooks to be adopted in schools and in Institutions for classical, scientific, teaching and technical instruction, in courses for professional formation and in Royal schools, officially recognised, state recognised and private schools» (art. 7) was instituted. Such a Central Commission would be «headed by the Ministry, composed of general directors for middle education, both classic and technical, by the general inspector of secondary schools for professional formation, and by the central inspectors for classic and technical middle instruction». The Minister for National Education could, «for single subjects, build special committees, in the heart of the Commission», which would be able to combine people and experts who were not part of the «same Commission»⁸⁴.

If it is true that, at least in this phase, the introduction to secondary schools of a preventive censorship of textbooks was destined to stay on the paper and not produce concrete effects⁸⁵, it is also true, however, that the project would be taken up again, a few years later, by the new Minister of National Education Giuseppe Bottai and duly modified, not only in those aspects which had

⁸² See C.M. De Vecchi di Val Cismon, *Bonifica Fascista della cultura*, Milano, Mondadori, 1937.

⁸³ M. Galfré, *Il regime degli editori. Libri, scuola e fascismo*, cit., pp. 133-138.

⁸⁴ Royal Decree-Law 26th September 1935, n. 1845 – *Aggiornamento della legislazione relativa all'istruzione media classica, scientifica, magistrale ed artistica*, «Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale. Bollettino Ufficiale», 5th November 1935, I, n. 45, pp. 1-2, extract.

⁸⁵ See Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale, *Dalla Riforma Gentile alla Carta della Scuola*, Vallecchi, Firenze, 1941, pp. 369-370.

made all but impossible the functioning of the Central Commission during the time of De Vecchi, but also in the composition and functions attributed to such an organ.

In a *Report on the bill concerning modifications of the art. 7 of the Royal Decree – Law 26th September 1935, n. 1845*, dated 6th February 1939 and conserved among the papers of the General Direction of Classical, Scientific and Teaching Education, in fact, a series of modifications to the text were proposed. In the first place, it was established that the Minister was to be relieved of the presidency, «that he cannot follow the work of the Commission»; to the same Minister of National Education, however, were attributed «the free choice of components, in such a way that [the choice] may also fall on elements which, though not covering determined offices in the administration, have a specific competence in the field»⁸⁶.

The layout of the law predisposed in February 1939, also foresaw two further and important changes with respect to the text of Vecchi: on the one hand a «preventive deposit, at the Ministry of National Education, of exemplary models of textbooks newly published or re-printed» was to be introduced; on the other, the functions of the Central Commission were to be redefined, and it would no-longer exercise direct control on texts but would limit itself to «the studying and formulation of proposals to the Ministry on the contents and every other question relating to textbooks for the middle schools»⁸⁷.

The introduction of a preventive censorship for the textbooks for middle schools too, as noted, was concretised a few months later with the emission of the School Charter. The «XXVII Declaration» of the measures predisposed by Giuseppe Bottai, in fact, apart from confirming the maintenance of the State Single Text in the elementary schools, established that the books for the middle and secondary schools could not «be printed without the preventive approval, on the manuscript or on the draft, of the Ministry of National Education»⁸⁸.

At the origin of the change in censorship inaugurated by De Vecchi in 1935, but in reality made operative by Bottai, we find several reasons. In the case of De Vecchi, the basic question was to exert a more direct and organic control on publishers and, at the same time, to begin what was judged a sort of urgent undelayable rationalisation of a sector which had grown in an abnormal manner during the first half of the 1930's (indeed, in 1935 it was the Minister De Vecchi who denounced how in the secondary schools more than ten thousand

⁸⁶ *Relazione sullo schema di legge concernente la modifica dell'art. 2 [i.e. art. 7] del Regio Decreto-L. 26 settembre 1935, n. 1845*, 6 febbraio 1939, in ACS, MPI, Direzione generale dell'istruzione classica, scientifica e magistrale, Divisione I, *Libri di testo etc. 1923-1959*, b. 4, f. 16.

⁸⁷ See respectively the articles n. 1 and 2 of the *Schema di Legge concernente la modifica dell'art. 2 [i.e. art. 7] del Regio Decreto-L. 26 settembre 1935, n. 1845*, cit.

⁸⁸ G. Bottai, *La Carta della Scuola*, cit., p. 85.

texts resulted adopted, among which 500 manuals of philosophy, the same number for history, 1,550 Italian classics, 1,000 Latin classics and so forth⁸⁹). Nevertheless the motivations which convinced Giuseppe Bottai to embrace the cause of the introduction of preventive censorship on textbooks even in the middle schools, were very different.

In reality, just the difficulties met in the preceding months in the systematic application in schools of the regulations introduced with the racial laws, had led the Minister to work towards the overcoming of the logic of indirect control – a derivation of the ideas of Gentile –, i.e. entrusted to individual professors, the heads of schools and the teaching bodies, and to purposely build a Commission for the purge of school books on the basis of anti-Jewish dispositions. With regards to this we can also note the many demands made by heads to the Ministry of National Education to remove doubts regarding the belonging to the Jewish race of many textbook authors whose surname lent itself to ambiguous interpretation; as is noted the request for «guide lines» or for more precise indications from the Ministry regarding the application of the racial laws put forward, especially in the first phase of the application of the measures, on behalf of the “scrupulous” educational superintendents and equally “scrupulous” heads of institutes⁹⁰.

More generally, it must be highlighted that the racial laws made a deep impression on the redefinition of the rules for the publishing market and on the question of textbooks, as much an element of proof – a sort of litmus paper – of the strength of the system and its control methods put to work on this question by the Fascist Regime.

Of the overall effect – economic and moral – produced on school publishing, we find a significant reference in a letter sent 18th August 1938 by Federico Gentile, son of the philosopher and ex-minister Giovanni Gentile, to the historian of literature Luigi Russo, opportunely used by Monica Galfré. In this letter, after having manifested the difficulties of the Florentine publishing house Sansoni in finding a literature manual destined to substitute that “classic” of Momigliano, Federico Gentile so summed up the situation created and justified his conduct: «Do not think badly of me if I throw myself like a vulture on this field strewn with bodies which is the Italian school. But I know that all the other publishers are moving, considering that the coming year there will be a large market to take advantage of»⁹¹. And the great market to take advantage of, naturally, was that left by the books of authors who had forcibly been removed from the schools for racial reasons.

⁸⁹ C.M. De Vecchi di Val Cismon, *Bonifica Fascista della cultura*, pp. 177-178 (this is the speech made by the Minister in the Senate on 21st March 1935).

⁹⁰ See the deep and well-documented analysis by M. Galfré, *Il regime degli editori. Libri, scuola e fascismo*, cit., pp. 150-161.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

Without doubt the valuation of the work of those – the teachers in first place – who were called to apply such laws, is more complex. The data, though very fragmentary, at our disposition with respect to the behaviour manifested by the teachers, testifies that reactions to such orders were rare, almost inexistent⁹². For the rest, the widespread spirit of conformism and the strong conditioning exercised by the Regime on the school world were destined to weigh heavily on the behaviour of the individuals and to make an open rebellion improbable.

In some ways the question of the behaviour of the school world and of its principal participants, with respect to the racial laws, emerges as a sort of metaphor of a more general problem on which it is opportune to pause as a point of conclusion of this contribution, or rather – as mentioned in the introduction – whereas we intend to identify and propose new areas of research.

Conclusions

The scene rapidly outlined here allows us to highlight a series of historiographical gaps, which research needs to fill. With relation to the strategies adopted and the characteristics of book production for schools of the great publishing houses of the central-north peninsula, for example, the studies offer a picture which in some ways is exhaustive. However, it needs to be integrated with further and more specific research which is relative to other important publishers – I am thinking in particular of Sandron, Carabba and a large part of the southern publishers⁹³ – or of specific problems and great moments such as those relative to the conduct and choices of the bodies appointed to the battle against illiteracy, and on which the recent annotations of Galfré relative to the *Ente Nazionale di Cultura*, directed by Giovanni

⁹² In addition to the aforementioned: R. De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei sotto il fascismo*, cit., pp. 591-594; F. Levi, *Le leggi razziali e la scuola*, cit.; *La legislazione antiebraica in Italia e in Europa. Atti del Convegno nel cinquantenario delle leggi razziali (Roma, 17-18 ottobre 1988)*, cit.; see also: U. Caffaz, *L'antisemitismo italiano sotto il fascismo*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1975; and Id., *Discriminazione e persecuzione degli ebrei nell'Italia Fascista*, Firenze, Consiglio regionale della Toscana, 1988.

⁹³ For a general sight about these publishers and the school publishing in southern Italy between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see R. Sani, *L'editoria scolastico-educativa nell'Italia meridionale tra Otto e Novecento: il caso Sandron (1839-1925)*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», 1997, 4, pp. 53-84; G. Oliva (ed.), *La Casa Editrice barabba e la cultura italiana ed europea tra Otto e Novecento*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1999; R. Sani, *L'editoria scolastica nell'Italia meridionale dell'Ottocento*, in G. Chiosso (ed.), *Il libro per la scuola tra Sette e Ottocento*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2000, pp. 225-275; G. Millevolte, G. Calmieri, L. Ponziani (eds.), *Tipografia e editoria in Abruzzo e Molise. Il XX secolo*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2007.

Marchi and animated by Ernesto Codignola⁹⁴, represent only the first, though very important, step. It would be enough here to hint at a sodality such as the *Associazione Maestri per le Scuole del Popolo* in Milan⁹⁵ to understand the importance of such areas of study.

We can add that, if we set aside Mondadori and the Florentine reality on which a wealth of studies and research now exists⁹⁶, the local dimensions – or rather the links between the publishers for school and the cultural and scientific institutions such as, for example, the universities and the individual secondary school institutes of the land, or those local groups of power and the suburb organisms of the PNF (National Fascist Party) – so important during the twenty year Fascist period, still appear to be little studied. The absence of an initial research in this area makes the general picture uncertain and does not allow us to collect the real dynamics which characterised the activity and work of the individual educational institutes.

Also lacking, it seems to me, is the state of research on the role held by particular intellectual figures represented by the collaborators of the publishers. Monica Galfré, Gabriele Turi and other historians have dwelled upon considering some well known figures: Giovanni Gentile (Sansoni, Le Monnier, Bemporad, Olschki), Ernesto Codignola (Vallecchi, La Nuova Italia), Giuseppe Lombardo Radice (Sandron, Battiato, Giannotta)⁹⁷. Central figures undoubtedly, but which represent in reality only the tip of the iceberg. This backdrop, too, is still in large part to deepen, especially with regard to the numerous small

⁹⁴ M. Galfré, *Il regime degli editori. Libri, scuola e fascismo*, cit., pp. 51-57.

⁹⁵ See R. Sani, *Bollettino della Biblioteca Circolante dei Maestri Italiani. Gruppo di Azione per le Scuole del popolo*, in G. Chiosso (ed.), *La stampa pedagogica e scolastica in Italia (1820-1943)*, Brescia, La Scuola, 1997, pp. 114-116; R. Lollo, *Cultura magistrale a Milano. Il «Gruppo d'Azione» e la biblioteca nazionale dei maestri italiani*, Milano, Prometheus, 1996; and M.M. Rossi, *Il Gruppo d'azione per le scuole del popolo di Milano (1919-1941)*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2004.

⁹⁶ With specific reference to school publishing see: E. Decleva, *Arnoldo Mondadori*, cit.; M. Galfré, *Mondadori dallo scolastico alla grande editoria*, in C. Betti (ed.), *Percorsi del libro per la scuola fra Otto e Novecento. La tradizione toscana e le nuove realtà del primo Novecento in Italia*, cit., pp. 215-231; C. Betti, *L'editoria scolastica e pedagogica fiorentina e le sue novità*, *ibid.*, pp. 279-295; C.M. Simonetti, *L'editoria fiorentina dal 1920 al 1940. Proposte per una ricerca*, «Ricerche storiche», XII (1982), 2-3, pp. 541-568; Id., *I percorsi dell'editoria fiorentina*, «Biblioteche oggi», X (1992), 2, pp. 195-227.

⁹⁷ S. Giusti, *Una casa editrice negli anni del fascismo. La Nuova Italia (1926-1943)*, cit.; A. Piccioni (ed.), *Una casa editrice tra società, cultura e scuola. La Nuova Italia 1926-1986*, cit.; G. Pedullà, *Il mercato delle idee. Giovanni Gentile e la Casa editrice Sansoni*, cit.; C. Ceccuti, *La Le Monnier dal Risorgimento alla Repubblica (1837-1987). Centocinquanta anni per la cultura e per la scuola*, cit.; G. Turi, *Giovanni Gentile. Una biografia*, cit.; G. Pedullà, *Gli anni del fascismo: imprenditoria privata e intervento statale*, in G. Turi (ed.), *Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea*, cit., pp. 341-382; R. Sani, *L'editoria scolastica nell'Italia meridionale dell'Ottocento*, cit., pp. 225-275; M. Galfré, *Il regime degli editori. Libri, scuola e fascismo*, cit., pp. 36-90 and *passim*. For a more general analysis, see now the deep observations by G. Turi, *Lo Stato educatore. Politica e intellettuali nell'Italia Fascista*, cit.

and medium sized publishing houses whose production was aimed primarily at the secondary schools, sometimes with significant niches of the market: we can think, for example, Agnelli, Cogliati, Albrighi & Segati and Trevisini of Milano, Paravia, Loescher, Petrini and Marietti of Torino, Zanichelli of Bologna, Morano of Napoli, and Principat of Messina, to name only the more significant⁹⁸.

Questions which are similar in part emerge when, from the itineraries of school publishing we pass to the other part of the problem or rather to the characteristics and movements of the process of fascistisation of the Italian schools and in particular to the question of reception, or rather the results of such a process in terms of the teachers' adhesion and the impact of the cultural and formative proposals on the students. A highly important issue in which the relative aspects of the dynamics and the phenomenology of the consensus of the masses to the Regime and the Fascist ideology are reflected, but one which keeps more generally to the history of the mentality and of the building of a determined individual and collective image⁹⁹.

Very opportunely Carmela Covato has highlighted how today we assist to a real «transformation of the historiographical view». It does not, in fact, seem more opportune, she writes,

to refer to the linear myth of a “factory of consent”, a paradigm stated clearly by Philip Cannistraro in the 1970's, which alluded to a total correspondence between the Regime and the working of the ideological apparatus of the State, but rather it appears above all opportune to pay attention to the “fissures” of a project of standardisation which was organised from above, identifying the dyscrasias and the unfinished paths¹⁰⁰.

More generally, there is a need to verify – and it is certainly no small thing – the characteristics and limits of the incidence for the process of fascistisation on the world of the teachers and the students themselves; that is, to evaluate the effective impact of the ideology and the cultural and formative models carried by the textbooks; and, at the same time, to assess the many hypothesis formulated by historiography with regards to a presumed “weak” or “strong” adhesion by the teachers, according to a range of options which oscillate between a net opposition and a total identification with the Regime of Mussolini.

It is clear that such a plan of research presupposes an indispensable leap of quality even under the profile of the use of sources, which must necessarily be others than the ones used until now. On this argument I believe that signifi-

⁹⁸ For a first view about these publishers, see now G. Chiosso (ed.), *Teseo 900*, Milano, Editrice Bibliografica, 2007, cfr. *sub voces*.

⁹⁹ See A. Gibelli, *Il popolo bambino. Infanzia e nazione dalla Grande Guerra a Salò*, Torino, Einaudi, 2005.

¹⁰⁰ R. Sani, C. Covato, *Percorsi dell'editoria scolastica nel ventennio Fascista. A proposito di un recente volume*, cit., p. 380. Covato refers to the book of Ph. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1975.

cant indications will be able to come from the numerous and important researches which are being carried out at the moment on «school notebooks», and more in general on the so-called «infantile school writings» relative to the Fascist period: sources and fields of research as promising as they are difficult and delicate to handle¹⁰¹. The «memoirs», the «diaries», the «correspondence» and all that which bears witness to, and allows us to recuperate, the private life and individual experience of the teachers, can contribute to amplify and better define the picture. However, in this case too, we are dealing with sources which are difficult to find, which are not exhaustive nor systematic and which can give us only some parts of a mosaic which is extremely difficult to piece together.

The unquestionable difficulty in following these new paths of research, finds its compensation in the fact that this too is a way for the historians of education and schools to supply an important contribution to the analysis of a more complex history – in our case of the processes not only political-ideological but also cultural, and of the dynamics of the customs and the mentality which marked the Italian society between the two World Wars – which undoubtedly merits to be investigated in every aspect and detail.

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¹⁰¹ See J. Meda, D. Montino, R. Sani (eds.), *Quaderni di scuola. Una fonte complessa per la storia delle culture scolastiche e dei costumi educativi tra Otto e Novecento. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Macerata, 26-29 settembre 2007)*, still in print. For the analysis of the crucial role played by the “exercise books” during the twenty years Fascist period see in particular: L. Marrella, *I quaderni del Duce. Tra immagine e parola*, Taranto, Barbieri, 1995; A. Gibelli, *Il regime illustrato e il popolo bambino*, in V. De Grazia, S. Luzzatto, *Dizionario del fascismo*, I, Torino, Einaudi, 2002, pp. 262-263; Id., *Il popolo bambino. Infanzia e nazione dalla Grande Guerra a Salò*, cit.; D. Montino, *Le parole educate. Libri e quaderni tra fascismo e Repubblica*, cit.; see also A. Ascenzi, *The Pigna Paper Mill and the exercise books of the «new Italy» (1870-1960)*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», III (2008), 1, pp. 217-255.